Namdhari in News

Music

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Tabla maestro weaves magic at Bhaini Sahib

Minna Zutshi

Tribune News Service

Bhaini Sahib, January 12,2014

As the Saturday evening descended on Bhaini Sahib, the seat of the Namdhari sect, strains of classical music wafted through the cold January air. The audience, seated deferentially on the floor, had assembled for the second Satguru Jagjit Singh Sangeet Sammelan that had brought noted percussionist Ustad Zakir Hussain to Bhaini Sahib after more than 14 years.

The evening had, as a warm-up, Hidayat Hussain Khan's sitar recital plumbing the depths of ‘birhah’ (separation), ‘prem’ (love) and ‘vairagya’ (renunciation). Unlike the high-strung music that blares past the audience, Hussain’s sitar recital accompanied by Harpreet Singh Namdhari on ‘tabla’ had a soothing note to it.

As the evening progressed, the audience’s eagerness to listen to Punjab Gharana tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain was palpable. The audience watched with rapt attention as Hussain’s profile was read out: “A child prodigy whose stage programmes started at the age of 12 in 1963… a tabla maestro who learnt initial music from his illustrious father Ustad Alla Rakha…a winner of a long list of awards, including the Padma Shri in 1988, Padma Bhushan in 2002 and Grammy Award in 2009…a phenomenon in the field of percussion who has collaborated and performed with international artistes.”

The Saturday evening at Bhaini Sahib turned into a musical repast for the soul as Ustad Zakir Hussain, accompanied by Ajay Joglekar on harmonium, started with ‘Upajj’ and went on to play ‘kaayadas’ from the Punjab Gharana. “There’s an apocryphal tale about the journey of ‘bandish’ from Punjab to Benaras (Varanasi) through Delhi and Lucknow as part

of a gift to a son-in-law. It accounts for the similarity in the 'bandish' of Punjab and Benaras Gharanas," said the maestro.

As the evening drew to a close, Zakir Hussain's tabla produced the sounds of 'damru' and conch.

Punjab's silent musical revolution

Reeta Sharma

April 6, 2003

**Balwant Singh Namdhari (extreme right)
was decorated with the Punjab State Award this year**

HE is 84 and the religious head of lakhs of Namdharis all over the world, including India. Besides being a spiritual leader, Satguru Jagjit Singh has given birth to a parallel religion — the religion of music.

In the history of music, he will always be credited with unmatched passion that sowed the seeds of a silent musical revolution in Punjab, which of late has had little to boast of in the field of classical music. Although age is catching up with him yet his thirst for music remains insatiated. It was as early as 1959 that Satguru Jagjit Singh had foreseen the dearth of talent in the field of classical music in Punjab. He was taken aback to learn that only two *ragis*, Darshan Singh and Khazan Singh, were using Indian classical vocal forms while reciting *Gurbani*. What will happen in the future, he asked himself. "People of Punjab had not realised that this fine art was being eroded in the state. I desperately wanted classical music to thrive in the state," reminiscences the Satguru.

His resolve soon witnessed the initiation of young talent into the world of music. Satguru Jagjit Singh, who himself excels in Indian classical vocal and instrumental music, started imparting knowledge to boys and girls, aged between 5 and 10 years. Soon the number began to multiply. The untiring, unrelenting and consistent devotion of the '*guru* and his disciples' over a period of 10 to 15 years began to bear fruit.

Beyond the fast-paced lifestyle of the Punjabis and unnoticed by the powers that be, in a remote village called Bhaini Sahib, known as the seat of the Namdhari sect, the foundation of Indian classical vocal/instrumental music was being laid. Though it takes a long time for any such serious forms of music to gain recognition, Bhaini Sahib saw the rise of Mohan Singh

Namdhari and Sukhdev Singh Namdhari, who have carved a niche for themselves in the world of music. They have performed not only at Haraballabh, held annually in Jalandhar, but also at various other functions in other parts of the country and even abroad.

Satguru's legacy

Satguru Jagjit Singh's contribution to the Namdhari sect can be gauged from the following diktats issued by him:

Marriage ceremonies should be kept simple. There should be no indulgence in extravaganza. Both the groom and the bride must dress in plain white. No jewellery must be worn and no dowry must be given. Marriages must not take place in hotels or lavish pandals but only at nearby Namdhari temples.

No morsel of food to be wasted, as overwhelming poverty marks the lives of millions.

Crackers must not be burst on Divali because the ensuing pollution not only harms the environment but also brings into focus the wide disparity between the haves and have-nots.

Lohri must not to be celebrated on the birth of a boy, as that would speak of gender discrimination.

Loud speakers should not to be used in Namdhari temples, for they add to noise pollution and disturb the people living around.

One should not possess too many clothes, as such belongings generate materialistic desires besides creating disparity.

Watching of films on TV or cinema halls are not allowed but children are encouraged to watch news, sports or any other educative programmes.

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That Satguru Jagjit Singh did not restrict his teachings to his followers alone but imparted his knowledge of music to others too speaks volumes for his dedication and zeal. Once in Gwalior, when he heard budding Indian classical vocalists Rajan and Sajjan Mishra, he immediately took them under his wing. When he learnt that the two brothers were earning their living as petty clerks, he immediately offered to pay them double the amount they were earning from Namdharis' offerings. He wanted them to devote themselves totally to *riyaz* without worrying about their bread and butter. Today, the Mishra brothers are the pride of India and they do not get tired of acknowledging the role played by Satguru Jagjit Singh in promoting their career.

Once again, led by his farsightedness, he consciously decided to revive many dying musical instruments of Punjab. As a result of his efforts, rabab, dilruba, saranda, sarangi, santoor and sitar have been popularised by his disciples, who play them oblivious of any consumerist or materialistic pressures. Hundred of children in the age group

of 8 and 15 years are today learning to play these instruments and are also being trained in classical vocal. A stream of students, including Mohan Singh and Sukhdev Singh, have been making waves at various musical performances in India and abroad.

Two young boys, Balwant Singh Namdhari and Harjinder Singh Namdhari, are being taken note of music circles in India. Balwant is not only being acknowledged as one of the most promising players of santoor, sitar and tabla but is also a name to be reckoned with as a classical vocalist. On this February 27, he was decorated with the Punjab State Award for Indian Classical Vocal and Santoor Vadan at a state-level function in Kapurthala by the Punjab Chief Minister, Capt. Amarinder Singh.

Namdhari children being initiated into the music tradition

Harjinder Singh has won a name for himself as a noteworthy rabab player. The sparkle in the eyes of Satguru Jagjit Singh cannot be missed as he hears his disciple Harjinder Singh, the only other player of rabab besides himself, weaving a *raga* on this majestic instrument. Harjinder Singh has already adopted two young Namdhari children to train them to play this instrument. Interestingly, Harjinder is also equally comfortable with the bansuri, dilruba and sarod.

It may be mentioned here that in 1930, Bhai Taba, the last *rababi* of that era, was forsaken by his employers. Likewise, Bhai Naseer, the pakhawaj player of the time, found no patrons. It was at this

juncture, when both these artists were finding no patronage, that they were adopted by Guru Partap Singh of the Namdharis. The duo thus became the *hazoori* musicians of the guru.

Satguru Jagjit Singh has ensured that all students at Bhaini Sahib should learn both vocal as well as instrumental music. So while you have Devinder Singh who not only excels at playing the dilruba but also sings classical numbers, there are others like Satwant Singh, Jagjit Singh and Harpreet Singh who are enthusiastically learning the finer nuances of music under the *guru-shishiya parampara*.

Satguru Jagjit Singh's name, as a renowned musician, would also be remembered for having evolved new *maatras* like *paune aath* (seven and three-fourths), *paune pandhran* (fourteen and three-fourths), *sava chaudhan* (fourteen and one-fourth), *saade staran* (seventeen and a half) and *teran sahi satt bata aath* (thirteen and seven-eights).

Though lakhs of Namdharis all over the world and within India revere and look up to Satguru Jagjit Singh, this humble religious head, in turn, has a lot of respect for his musicians. The musicians who

perform sit on a higher platform than the seat reserved for the guru of Namdharis.

Namdharis from the pages of history

Satguru Jagjit Singh playing

Guru Ram Singh, the founder of the Kuka movement, rose to fame after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1939. He proved to be the rabab not only a religious philosopher but also an unparalleled patriot. Aghast at palace conspiracies and intrigues and degeneration of fellow Indians of the time, he vowed to build an army of puritanical Sikhs who would fight for the freedom of the country.

A great visionary, he mixed religion with politics of the time in such a manner so as to motivate the Kukas to fight for the freedom of their country. The residents of the tiny village of Bhaini Sahib, where Guru Ram Singh and his followers lived, made the British spend sleepless nights. The desperation of the British was evident from the Malerkotla massacre of 1872. A clash between the Kukas and a Sikh zamindarwas used by the then Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, L. Cowan, to not only teach a lesson to the Kukas but also to send signals to all other anti-British forces. He arrested 68 Kukas and without trial and blew up 66 of them by tying them to the mouths of canons.

Guru Ram Singh and 11 of his followers were arrested and deported to Burma and all Kuka assemblies were banned.

For the next 13 years, Guru Ram Singh led an isolated life and eventually died in Rangoon in 1885.

Guru Ram Singh was succeeded by his younger brother, Hari Singh. The British did not allow Guru Hari Singh to leave Bhaini Sahib village, near Ludhiana, which was to be the main base of the Kukas for the next 21 years. On his death in 1906, Guru Hari Singh was succeeded by his son Guru Partap Singh, who in turn was succeeded by the present Satguru Jagjit Singh.

The Namdharis and their gurus are credited with many firsts. Besides making several outstanding contributions to society, Guru Ram Singh had issued edicts, both political and social, to his followers:

1. As many as 62 years ahead of Mahatma Gandhi, Guru Ram Singh advocated the practise of non-cooperation with the then ruling British as a way to free India.

2. The Namdharis were asked not to accept any government service offered by the British.

3. They were also told to boycott all educational institutions opened by the British.

4. They were forbidden to use any foreign-made goods.

5. The Namdharis were asked to disobey and resist the laws and orders that their conscience abhorred.

6. They were to boycott the law courts started by the British.

7. They were also not to use the British postal services.

Guru Ram Singh's instructions to Namdharis in the social context were also amazingly progressive for his times. Some of them are as follows:

1. Do not indulge in infanticide or trade in female children.

2. Do not practise child marriages.

3. Do not lie or steal or indulge in adultery.

4. Abstain from intoxicants like alcohol, tobacco or any other drugs.

5. Do not give or take dowry. (He had forbidden his followers from spending more than Rs 13 at a wedding).

6. Do not borrow or lend money on interest.

7. Do not indulge in casteism. All human beings are born alike.

In fact, Guru Ram Singh also gets the credit for having set up a system similar to the present Panchayati Raj. He had adopted and evolved this system for his followers. When the Kukas boycotted the British courts, the panchayats settled all their social disputes.

Master percussionist

Ustad Zakir Hussain goes by his father's teaching

— be student forever...

Minna Zutshi

Punjab is a very special place for the Punjab Gharana's noted percussionist Ustad Zakir Hussain. It's the place where music has been honoured, loved and nurtured and the future of music has been assured here, he says, while on a visit to Bhaini Sahib.

"When I come here, I'm paying homage to one of the greatest temples of art and music, which is Bhaini Sahib. It's a matter of pride that this exists in the state where I belong to and where the music I learnt was born."

He feels that to be in Punjab is to be at home. “The energy at home keeps you going. You absorb that flow of energy.”

The tabla maestro believes that music, in its organic form, is one of the most positive vibrations on the earth. He draws a parallel between music and nature: “Just as there’s something organically beautiful about a banyan tree spreading around, there’s a special beauty, power and energy in music in its organic form.”

On the future of tabla in music, he says, “Musical instruments are tied with the music of the time. Those that convey the music that’s heard (by the audience) are the prevalent instruments. Be it santoor or sarod recital or khayal gayaki, tabla happens to be the (musical) instrument of choice. So long as these music forms survive, tabla will be heard.”

Striking a philosophical note, the tabla maestro known for his impromptu improvisations and also for his innovative streak, says instruments have a spirit (soul) in them. The trick is to become connected with the spirit, to get the spirit accept you.

Though he credits his father with being a decisive influence on his music, he says many people have shaped and

guided his musical journey. “My father is my guru. He provided me the tools to express myself in the world of art. How I utilize these tools has a lot to do with my ability to interact with others of his stature.”

Thousands bid adieu to Satguru

Our Correspondent

Bhaini Sahib (Khanna), December 14

Namdhari chief Satguru Jagjit Singh, who breathed his last at SPS Apollo Hospital in Ludhiana yesterday, was cremated here today amid tight security arrangements.Thousands of Namdhari followers and prominent persons attended the last rites.

The pyre was lit by the Satguru's cousin Jai Singh amidst the chanting of hymns. Baba Balwinder Singh performed the ardas. A special stage was erected for the last rites.

Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, Dera Radhasoami head Baba Gurinder Singh, Congress leader Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, Cabinet Minister Adesh Partap Singh Kairon, Sharanjit Singh Dhillon, PS Chandumajra, Ranjit Singh Talwandi, Sarwan Singh Phillaur, Sant Jagtar Singh, Jagdev Singh Jassowal, Indian hockey team captain Sardara Singh, Sant Amrik Singh Panj Bhainian Waale, Member of Parliament (MP) from Jharkhand Inder Singh Namdhari, HS Hanspal, former MP, former ministers Santokh Singh, Satpal Gosain and Laal Singh, legislators Amrik Singh Dhillon and Gurkirat Singh and several other prominent persons attended the cremation.

There were long queues of devotees trying to have a last glimpse of the Satguru. Jathedar Iqbal Singh recited shabads.

Preneet Kaur, Union Minister of State for External Affairs, has expressed profound grief at the Satguru's demise. She spoke to Sant Jagtar Singh on the telephone and expressed her condolences."We stand by the Namdhari Darbar in this hour of grief," she said in a statement.

She described the Satguru as " a spiritual guide who showed the way to peace to mankind."

The minister recalled the contribution of the Kuka Movement to India's freedom struggle.

Senior Congress leader Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, expressing grief over the death, demanded that the final World Kabaddi Cup match scheduled for tomorrow should be postponement till the bhog ceremony.

She said the government should refrain from holding cultural programmes with performances by Bollywood stars.

Millions have lost their spiritual guide: PM

Tribune News Service

New Delhi, December 14

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh condoled the passing away of Satguru Jagjit Singh, head of the Namdhari sect, saying that millions had lost their spiritual guide.

In a message to Mata Harchand Kaur, the PM said the Satguru's message of peace and brotherhood would “continue to show us the way forward.”

"I received the news of Satguru Jagjit Singh's passing away with deep sorrow and a sense of loss. The Satguru's teachings were based on the timeless principle of respect for all religions. His was a simple life devoted to the service of others. He was a source of guidance, inspiration and solace to millions.

“He was also a renowned musician, well-versed in rare and original ragas, who worked to preserve the traditions of Indian classical music. I convey my heartfelt condolences to you, the near and dear ones of the Satguru and to his

countless followers on this sad occasion'', read the PM's message.

OBITUARY

He promoted classical music in Punjab

Vandana Shukla

Chandigarh, December 14

With the demise of Satguru Jagjit Singh, Punjab has lost its sole promoter of Hindustani classical music. Satguru, himself an accomplished vocalist, percussionist and instrumentalist, never sought a career in music. Instead he became a music patron.

It was at Bhaini Sahib, the commune of the Namdharis near Jalandhar, that the Satguru introduced a model for research, conservation and propagation of classical music that finds no parallel in the country.

He encouraged the young to pursue classical music by creating a certain ambience at the dera (commune).The young would wake up to the recitation of Asa ki vaar to the accompaniment of pure tantri vadya (stringed instruments). At least,150 children received training in classical music free of cost at the dera round the year.

For the young who attended regular school, special classes were organised in the evening, food was made available to them round-the-clock. Instruments were customised so that the children could surfeit difficult permutations of tala and ragas.

From among these children, the Satguru would pick the gifted ones and sent them for training under maestros. “Music is an integral part of the Sikh religion. He took upon himself the responsibility of keeping its purity in tact, and he did it with dedication, himself being such an accomplished musician,” says Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma.

Research and archival work on traditional knowledge of music, that should have been taken up by universities, the government and research institutions, was carried out by the Satguru with unfailing dedication.

“He proved by example that the path to spirituality is paved with music,” adds Pt Sharma. He re-discovered several musical instruments and re-introduced talas and ragas lost to time.

He created an unusual ability among the commune inhabitants to understanding the finer nuances of classical music. The Satguru himself was known as a wizard of Punjab pakhawaj. “Even the likes of Ustad Alla Rakha, Pundit Kishen Maharaj and Shanta Prasadji would be amazed by his brilliance in tala.

Many masters have played half matras, but the Satguru had mastered even savaya and pauna matras ,(one and a quarter and three fourth of a beat) a miracle in percussion,” says Rajan Mishra of the famous Rajan Sajan Mishra brothers. The vocalist brothers remain indebted to the Satguru for his help and guidance in their pursuit of music

Young gifted musicians from the dera, who were sent to masters like Pt Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Ustad Zakir Husain, Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma, Pts Rajan and Sajan Mishra, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, late Ustad Vilayat Khan and Pt Birju Maharaj, returned to share their knowledge with other budding talents in India and abroad.

" He was honoured as the Fellow of Sangeet Natak Akademi last year. He was a renaissance man who could play several instruments. He was a master of the Dhrupad gayaki, he sent young students to all gharanas to create a confluence of music. Mighty governments could not do what he did for music, to keep the richness of our great heritage of music alive," says Kamal Tewari, Chairman, Chandigarh Sangeet

Music is food for their soul

Sunday, March 18, 2012SD Sharma

AS a part of the ongoing commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the apex body of performing arts in India, has conferred the one-time honour of Akademi Rattan and Akademi Puruskar awards to maestros in the realms of art. The honour, to be presented by the President of India shortly, carries a purse of Rs 3 lakh and Rs 1 lakh, respectively, besides a citation, shawl and memento. The following awardees have got Akademi Rattan awards.

Satguru Jagjit Singh Bhaini Sahib:

Spiritual mentor and musicologist

The spiritual head of the Namdhari Sikh sect, based at Bhaini Sahib in Punjab, the revered Satguru Jagjit Singh (93) has been credited with preservation and propagation of Indian classical musical arts, gurmat sangeet, sports, religion, philosophy and social awakening. He has also influenced the life of over two million followers the world over. Born to Sri Satguru Partap Singh and Mata Bhupinder Kaur, he received his education and learning of music initially from his father and guru at Bhaini Sahib, before mastering the nuances of Hindustani vocal, instrumental classical music and gurmat sangeet from ustaads like Harnam Singh, Udho Khan, Rahim Baksh, Bhai Taba and Bhai Nasir.

An accomplished and brilliant classical vocalist, the Satguru has an adroit mastery of rare compositions of the traditional Talwandi gharana, old gur rababi keertan, Gurbani dhuniyan, composed in quarter denomination of rhythmic patterns (khand matras),besides Dhrupad dhamar. His versatility encompasses playing all musical instruments with perfection, especially the Dilruba which he plays with his nails, indeed a rare accomplishment.

With an ardent passion for music, he augmented the music training sessions under his care and introduced annual competitions to be held in Gurbani recitation, general knowledge, kavi sammelans, dewans and practical training of shodh maryada, quiz contests, painting competitions and sports, all of which infused fresh blood in the campus activities. Gurmat and classical sangeet is very close to his heart. The Bhaini Sahib Music Akademi, established in 1928, has produced brilliant gems of classical music. The Satguru sponsored the training and tutelage of aspiring musicians with potential to be maestros. Trained under Pandit Krishan Maharaj, the tabla maestro Sukhwinder Singh Pinky shared the Grammy Award with Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt.

Postage stamp on Kuka Movement released

Tribune News Service

Ludhiana, January 3,2015

A postage stamp on Kuka Movement released by the Postal Department created excitement amongst philatelists. Origin of Namdhari (Kuka) Movement took place in the district.

The Central Government decided to release the postage stamp to mark 150 years of the movement. “It is an

important stamp for the philatelists as it is related to Punjab. The relevance of the stamp increases for Ludhianvis because Bhaini Sahib, centre of Namdharis is located here," said Mukesh, a philatelist. "Historically, the movement is very significant as it was the one the one of the early movements to oust British," said another philatelist. The postage stamp is very important, he said.

The Centre had decided to release postage stamp to mark 150 years of Kuka movement earlier this year, but it was delayed for some reason. "This would be an important part of my collection," said another philatelist. "I have been collection postage stamps on the theme of freedom struggle, and this stamp has a lot of importance," he said.

"I have read about Kuka Movement. It is great to see a postage stamp released to mark 150 years of the movement," said Harpreet.

Amjad Ali Khan to set up music academy in Punjab

Press Trust of India | Chandigarh

May 18, 2015 Last Updated at 17:48 IST

Sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan today accepted the Punjabgovernment's offer to set up a state-of-the-art music academy in the state to revive the glory of Indian classical music.

During the launch of Gurbani Album of Shabads recited by eminent raagi Harbhajan Singh Namdhari and composed by Khan, Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal felicitated both the performers for this unique initiative.

Badal said he hoped this collection of Shabads would prove to be a 'food for soul' to sooth the tormented minds of millions of people in the world.

Highly impressed by Khan's enormous contribution towards promoting art and culture in the country especially in the field of classical music, the Chief Minister impressed upon him to establish this music academy to impart world

class training to the music aspirants on the line of traditional "Guru Shishya Parampara" (teacher pupil tradition).

The Chief Minister assured Khan of all necessary help and support and asked him to submit a detailed project report in this regard shortly so that it could be taken forward.

Badal offered suitable land for setting up the academy either at Mohali or New Chandigarh (Mullanpur).

Expressing gratitude to the Chief Minister for this benevolent gesture, Khan said he was passionate to start this music academy in Punjab- the soil of Gurus, saints, seers and prophets.

Khan said with this offer, one of his most cherished desires to promote the Indian classical music in every nook and corner of the country will come true.

Khan further said that he was keen to set up this academy in Punjab in order to pay glowing tributes to Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who preached the message of universal

brotherhood, love and oneness of God.

Other prominent guests at the event were Advisor on National Affairs and Media Harcharan Bains, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister S K Sandhu, Special Principal Secretaries to Chief Minister Gaggandip Singh Brar, K J S Cheema and S K Raju, President Namdhari Darbar Surinder Singh Namdhari besides Amaan Ali Khan and the family members of Harbhajan Singh.